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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 ADDIS ABABA 003443

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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PHUM](#) [PREL](#) [ET](#) [ELEC](#)

SUBJECT: ETHIOPIA: LEADING OPPOSITION COALITION BECOMES
UNIFIED PARTY

REF: A. ADDIS ABABA 3382

[1](#)B. ADDIS ABABA 3425

Classified By: Charge Vicki Huddleston for reason 1.4 (b,d).

1 (C) SUMMARY: The four parties belonging of the Coalition for Unity and Democracy (CUD), Ethiopia's leading opposition organization, officially merged Sept. 24 to form a single party of the same name. Hailu Shawel, the Coalition's chairman, will continue as president of the new party, but the second-tier of leadership will include several new faces from a younger generation. The large gathering assembled to launch the new party did not repeat Hailu's calls for bringing down the current government, and in general projected a unified, moderate and inclusive image. The CUD now represents the largest and most cohesive democratic opposition Ethiopia has ever had. While the Amhara ethnic group is heavily represented in the CUD, the party rejects ethnic-dominated politics and advocates free-market policies. The CUD has taken its latest evolutionary step just in time to confront the GOE in mass demonstrations and/or strikes in the coming days. The party's unity and political skills are likely to be severely tested. End Summary.

Something Old, Something New

[1](#)2. (C) The CUD held a full day of meetings Sept. 24 to finalize the dissolution of the coalition's four component parties and the birth of a new, unified political party of the same name. The large gathering formalized the election of Hailu Shawel, the 69-year-old chairman of the previous coalition, as the party's new president. Shawel's former political vehicle, the All Ethiopia Unity Party (AEUP), was the oldest and largest party (1.2 million members reported) in the previous CUD coalition. Shawel himself was absent from the meeting as he continues his political and medical trip to the U.S. (ref A). The new party's vice-presidents, on the other hand, come from a younger generation. Bertukan Mideksa, a 34 year-old former judge from Berhanu Nega's Rainbow Party, was elected the CUD's first vice-president. She is a relatively fresh face in politics, but gained some notoriety when, as a judge, she issued the order to release former Minister of Defense Seye Abraha from prison after the latter failed in an internal political challenge to PM Meles. The CUD's other young vice-president is 33 year-old Lidetu Ayalew, formerly of the EDP-Medhin Party, whose fiery rhetoric and charisma has earned him a large following among CUD youth. Lidetu's recent statements, however, have been considerably more moderate than those of Hailu Shawel. Muluneh Eyoel of the EDL, the coalition's fourth component party, got the Secretary General slot.

[1](#)3. (C) The new party also elected a 20-member executive committee that incorporates leaders from the four former parties in equal proportions -- this despite the fact that Hailu's AEUP far outnumbered the other groupings, none of which claims more than 100,000 members. While they can't match the AEUP's numbers, however, the other parties in the coalition appear to offer fresh political talent from more diverse ethnic groups than Hailu's mainly Amhara base. The CUD has explicitly rejected ethnically-oriented politics of the governing EPRDF coalition and has proven to be particularly popular in urban areas, where the degree of ethnic intermarriage is much greater than in Ethiopia's countryside.

An Ethiopian Big-Tent Approach

[1](#)4. (C) The roughly 500 people who gathered at an Addis Ababa hotel to mark the CUD's transformation into a party included a number of notable guests. Among them was former Ethiopian President Negasso Gidada, an Oromo who won a parliamentary seat in May national elections running as an independent. Marera Gudina, co-chair of the other main opposition coalition, the United Ethiopian Democratic Front (UEDF), was also in attendance. Marera, also an Oromo, took to the podium to congratulate the CUD on helping to consolidate the opposition -- what he called a rare feat in Ethiopian

politics. Marera's appearance underscored the cordial relationship between the CUD and UEDF within Ethiopia in spite of persistent tensions between the two movements in the exile community. CUD speakers also reiterated their desire to incorporate other political forces in the future.

Comment: Impressive, But Hardest Part Still Ahead

15. (C) The CUD's merger party was an impressive display of power and unity, and avoided the threatening rhetoric that its new president has employed in the U.S. Nonetheless, it will be increasingly difficult for CUD moderates to distance themselves from their own party president, as they did one last time last week. The newly-founded CUD party will face an enormous challenge in charting a course through impending mass demonstrations (ref B), as well as in deciding whether and how to take its seats in parliament. If it can survive the next several weeks, however, the CUD can look forward to governing Ethiopia's powerful capital city, and probably to expanding its share of the country's political pie in the coming years.
HUDDLESTON